

A County Commissioner Views County Road Management

BYRON PIKE, Commissioner
Wayne County

The formulation of a complete county road program in any county depends upon several things: money available, competent employees, construction supervision, equipment, miles and types of roads. But above all, it depends on a board of county commissioners that is not afraid to make policies and see them through.

I know nothing of other counties, but in Wayne County the money available is thus:

- 1) Our share of the motor vehicle highway account is \$485,000.
- 2) We have a $7\frac{1}{2}$ cent cumulative bridge fund which at present raises \$90,000. Under state-federal aid we have \$40,000 in matching money which gives us \$130,000 for bridge building.

With respect to employees, I am proud to say that we were the first county in the state of Indiana to hire a professional, full-time county highway engineer. We have two clerical people in the office and a total of 34 full-time employees. This staff handles a road system totaling 755 miles, 223 of which are hard-surfaced, 524 gravel, and 7 portland cement concrete.

What about policy? Policy is nothing other than what you can accomplish with the money you have available. We have to budget our new black-top roads to at least nine miles a year. We have to budget our berming and ditching program to at least 40 miles a year. We have to budget all bridge money to be spent, with the exception of \$25,000 each year that we hold back in case of emergency. I don't think there is a county commissioner in the state who doesn't know what an emergency might be. It is also necessary that we make five to ten channel changes each year to protect our bridges.

In 1961 our county engineer completed a county bridge survey covering all bridges over 20 feet in length, of which we have 200 such structures. The replacement value of those bridges is \$8,000,000. These bridges are classified as to their life expectancy, load limit, replacement cost, and needed repair. We also have pictures of the up-stream and down-stream side of each of these bridges. This does not

include 3,600 culverts in Wayne County that are twelve inches in diameter to eight feet in diameter.

In blacktopping new roads, we require a 50-foot right-of-way easement. This easement does not cost the county; we do not buy it, it has to be given to the county. We use a four-inch cold mix, 18 to 20 feet wide, depending upon the area in which it is used, compacted to $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches when it is finished.

Contracts are let only on bridges. All other road work, bridge repair, and culvert work is done by the county.

We have 230 miles of preferential roads with stop signs making them all through roads. Using the Purdue system, we completed in 1960 naming and numbering of all county roads. We center strip all hills and curves on blacktop roads. We install and maintain the various signs, slow, stop, hill, curve, and bus stop, by the sign department. We post all blacktop roads with a ten-ton load limit from the first of March to the first of June or until the danger of frost is over. We spray for weeds at all intersections and curves and we remove blind corners as fast as we can get the right-of-way and the money is available. For ice and snow removal, we use five sand spreaders, six graders, three under-truck scrapers and eight snow plows mounted on a dump truck. We have a bridge and culvert repair crew that includes four men and a foreman.

Public relations, I think, is a big battle for all county commissioners. You have to keep the public informed. We do so through newspaper releases, personal contacts with service and civic club organizations. Our news releases include pictures of the roads or bridges before and after their construction, and we try to inform the public on the road programs and improvements at least a year in advance. We have done that for the past four years.

With respect to cost records, time and material costs on each project can be readily determined from records required by the state board of accounts. We know what our labor cost is. Our labor cost starts at \$1.50 per hour for new employment, then we go to from \$1.55 to \$1.90 per hour. We work a 45-hour work week and no overtime because if there is overtime one week, the employees get time off, when it is possible, to make up for it. Our labor costs will average 32 per cent of the total budget. Each employee is entitled to one week vacation after one year and allowed seven working days sick leave provided he shows proof of sickness.

We think it is very important that a board of county commissioners act as a policy-making body in formulating both long- and short-range

road programs. It is still more important to have a competent experienced staff to carry out the policies and programs. It is our opinion that one of the most effective ways to accomplish a two-, three-, or four-year program is to make the term of the county commissioner a four-year term instead of three.